Fish Restoration in the Headwaters of the Green River

In 2000 the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and the Forest Service initiated a project to protect and restore native Colorado River cutthroat trout (CRCT) on the North Slope of the Uinta Mountains. The CRCT have been petitioned to be listed under the Endangered Species Act. It is estimated that genetically pure CRCT occupy only 5% of their historic range. The primary causes are degradation of stream habitat and competition /interbreeding with non-native fish. The remaining occupied habitat is found almost exclusively on National Forest lands in the states of Wyoming, Colorado and Utah. This project is maintaining genetic diversity and distribution of this unique and beautiful native trout in a portion of its historic range.

Two tributaries in the Gilbert Creek drainage were chemically treated in 2000. Over the next several years, additional treatments are planned throughout the drainage in an effort to restore native CRCT to that part of the drainage above a permanent fish migration barrier. Following the treatments, genetically pure CRCT will be restored to the drainage from adjacent populations and those fish collected prior to the treatment.

The Forest Service constructed two log fish barriers last summer. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department installed three steel mesh plate barriers and repaired the permanent barrier at the same time. CRCT and brook trout were removed above 4 tributary barriers with backpack electrofishing gear. The pure CRCT were placed in a refuge/holding area in the headwaters of Little Gilbert Creek. The brook trout and hybridized CRCT were released below the main fish migration barriers in Gilbert Creek. Two tributaries of Gilbert Creek were treated with the piscicides: antimycin and Rotenone. The treatment involved approximately two and a half miles of streams. (For more information on chemical treatments see: http://www.fisheries.org/rotenone/rotenonelinks.htm.) Chemical treatment of the 8 miles of Gilbert Creek will take several years due to the presence of beaver dams and side channels. CRCT populations will be rebuilding in the tributaries of Gilbert Creek while main Gilbert Creek is being treated. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is planning to begin treatments of the upper portion of the drainage in Utah this summer. Once all the non-native trout are removed from Gilbert Creek above the mainstem permanent barrier, the temporary barriers will be removed to allow fish passage. CRCT from the populations above the barriers will eventually colonize the downstream habitats.

Information sign installed with the original migration barrier back in the 1980s.

The main Gilbert Creek fish migration barrier that was reinforced in 2000.

Larry Johnson (Evanston RD, environmental planner), John Moran (Flaming Gorge RD, Fisheries Trainee), Mark Baker (Volunteer), Lewis Wasniewski (Hydrologist Flaming Gorge RD, Hydrologist) and Robert Keith (Wyoming Game and Fish Department) monitor and clean temporary, fish migration (permeable) barrier during spring runoff of 2001. Hand install in 2000 this temporary fish migration barrier has worked well to eliminate upstream migration of non-native fish. Robert Keith was the designer of the structures, which minimize impacts to the riparian zones and the stream channels.

Lewis Wasniewski (Hydrologist Flaming Gorge RD, Hydrologist), Mark Baker (Volunteer), and Larry Johnson (Evanston RD, environmental planner) review one of the migration barriers that was constructed during 2000.